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WASHINGTON POST
7 February 1987

FILE ONLY

U.S. Reporter Lands in Zurich

Seib Unharmed in Tehran Detention; Negotiations Kept Secret

By Robert J. McCartney
Washington Post Foreign Service

ZURICH, Feb. 6—Wall Street Journal correspondent Gerald F. Seib, expelled by the Iranian government after four days under arrest, said today that he had not been physically mistreated and that he was not sure why he had been detained.

Seib, who arrived here on a Swissair flight from the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, choked back tears as he said that he was "thrilled and thankful" to be out of Iran on his 31st birthday.

"Just being here is the best birthday present possible," the Cairo-based American reporter said in a short statement to about 30 journalists in the Zurich airport's VIP lounge. His wife, Barbara Rosewicz, who also is a Wall Street Journal correspondent, stood behind him and beamed.

Reading from a handwritten statement, Seib said that he had been living "comfortably" in the care of the Swiss Embassy in Tehran for the last day and a half before his departure from Iran this morning.

He had been detained on Saturday, and was charged with espionage. Iranian Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi said that Seib had "collected abnormal information" at Iran's war front with Iraq.

On Wednesday, however, the Iranian government said that a judicial investigation of the reporter had been completed, and that he had been ordered expelled and barred from returning to the country.

"I'm still not sure why I was detained or how I was released. All I know is that any suggestion that I was involved in any kind of espionage is completely false," Seib said.

"I am a journalist, and that's all I am," he said.

Seib had traveled to Iran with more than 50 other foreign journalists who had been invited to visit the war front. He said that he

"came to no physical harm in Iran," but provided no details of his captivity.

It was unclear how Seib's release had been arranged. The U.S. government deliberately has maintained a low profile in the affair, U.S. officials said, apparently to avoid aggravating the situation by

turning it into a public confrontation with Tehran.

An official from the U.S. Embassy in Bern was on hand here to welcome Seib to Switzerland, but an embassy spokesman declined to say who the official was. There was "a desire to keep it low-key," a U.S. official said.

In addition, it was learned here that Dow Jones & Co., which owns the Wall Street Journal, sought to avoid publicizing how it was handling the case and to keep the U.S. government from playing a highly visible role. This approach was designed to protect the interlocutors who were involved, and to avoid irritating the Iranian government.

Tehran appeared to have reacted favorably, and it was hoped that such an example might be useful in the future in procuring Iran's cooperation in winning freedom for other American prisoners held there.

Jon Pattis, a communications consultant from Bethesda, Md., has been held in Iran since June. A British businessman and a Canadian engineer are also under arrest.

The British Foreign Office demanded that Iran explain why it had held British businessman Roger Cooper, held in Tehran since December 1985, on television Thursday and denounced Cooper's appearance as "incomprehensible and totally unacceptable," United Press International reported. In the broadcast, Cooper said he had links to British intelligence and was setting up a spy network in Iran.]

Dow Jones limited its formal reaction today to a two-sentence statement by Chairman of the Board Warren H. Phillips. He said that the company was "delighted at Seib's safe return," and that Seib's

family joined his colleagues "in thanking the many public and private individuals in many countries whose support and assistance made his return possible."

A Dow Jones spokesman declined to comment on who had helped to arrange Seib's release, or what they had done, saying that the issue was too "sensitive."

"It would be inappropriate, for obvious reasons, to identify them by name," Larry Armour, director of corporate relations for Dow Jones, said in a telephone interview from New York.

Seib himself also said that he expected that "many people [and] organizations in many places" had contributed to his release. He did not elaborate, and declined to answer questions after making his statement.

[In Washington, Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Ozal, who is considered very well informed on events in Iran, said he had heard that Seib was arrested "because he asked too many questions of too many people . . . something like a spy."

[He told Washington Post editors and reporters that at the request of Wall Street Journal editor Robert L. Bartley, he had telephoned Prime Minister Mousavi on Wednesday morning "to ask about the situation and also the possibility of a release." He said he also called the Iranian ambassador in Ankara about two hours before Seib was released.]

Seib and his wife left Zurich soon after his arrival, and it was understood that they left Switzerland as well. But neither he nor the company would say where they had gone.

"Now what I want to do is spend some time with my wife, get in touch with my family in the United States, and I hope that all of you, imagining yourself being in my place, will respect our desire for some peace and privacy," Seib concluded.

The Swiss government was represented at Seib's arrival by Johann Ghisler, head of the Foreign Ministry's Foreign Interests Division. Switzerland represents U.S. interests in Iran. The two countries broke diplomatic relations in 1979.